

A LORD IN TROUBLE

By DONALD ALLEN

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For the last 200 years it has been the custom in a certain branch of the British government that the first lord, who would naturally be supposed to be at the head of the department, should effect himself for the benefit of the second. In other words, he is a figurehead and supposed to be content with the honor of the appointment. If the matter is not understood by the general public, it is thoroughly understood inside the "ring," and a first lord may take a trip to Africa for his full term for all that will be asked of him at home.

When Lord K. was appointed first lord no one should have better understood that the intention was to honor



THE WASTE PAPER BASKET AND ALL OTHER PLACES WHERE SEARCHED.

him and let him retire gracefully to his country seat. As a leader he had made a miserable failure. As a politician he was as dangerous to his friends as to his enemies. He was fussy, ill balanced, growing deaf, and the desire was to get rid of him without hurting his feelings. Perhaps a lord should know when a movement of that sort is on foot and appreciate its worth and do the retiring act in a graceful manner, but having carried the British government on his shoulders for the past ten years and fearing some great calamity if he laid down his burden, Lord K. was no sooner appointed first lord than he took his place and gave the second lord to understand that he intended to run things.

Confusion and consternation arose at once. Lord K. was no more fitted for the position than the humblest workman in England, but who was going to tell the cat and tell him so? He was sure to make blunders and mix things up, and just at that time the government wanted particularly to have things working smoothly. Some one "higher up" was finally found to give Lord K. a hint that he wasn't expected to meddle with things at headquarters, and the less he said for publication as first lord the better for himself and the government.

"Egad, but I have been appointed first lord, and first lord I will be," was his reply. "I was appointed because I appeared to be the only man in the country who could conduct that department properly, and I do not intend to disappoint my friends or the government. I shall be at my desk the same as any clerk."

Here was an unprecedented state of affairs, and many consultations were held. Even royalty was appealed to. It was admitted on all sides that the first lord would have to step out, but it was also admitted that he was fool enough to raise a row if any more broad hints were given him.

In this emergency an outsider was summoned. He was not only an outsider so far as officialdom was concerned, but outside of politics altogether, and not a hundred people in England knew him by sight. He was asked to do what the queen had said she saw no way of doing herself. He waited one week to see if Lord K. would not fall out of a cab and break his neck, and then he began work.

There being no official room or official desk or official messenger or official anything else for the first lord, he had taken possession of the second lord's quarters and was working to save England and her colonies to posterity when a messenger arrived with an important document. The messenger had come from France in all haste. The document was so important that it was sealed in four places and tied with the reddest of red tape, and the second lord, who carried it to the first lord, looked awed and handled the big envelope with reverence. It was a document not to be opened until the three lords should be seated together in council, and it so happened that the third lord had gone fishing or somewhere else that day. The first lord would be the custodian of the package for the day. It was left in his hands, and as he swelled with pride and dignity he put a paperweight on it and went out to lunch.

Five minutes after his return, an hour and a half later, all England began to tremble. In five more she was perspiring and feeling her knees wab-

ble. The paperweight was still there, but the important document from France was missing. Lord K. grew red and grew pale. He grew weak and he grew strong. He shouted at the top of his voice and he spoke in whispers. The document could not be found.

When he had been reduced to a proper frame of mind he was told by the second lord that he had been criminally careless; that while he sat and ate some spy of some foreign government had walked into the open office and swiped a document that might cost England 100,000 lives and \$100,000,000 in cash. It was gently intimated that he was known to be absentminded, and it was hinted that he might have taken the document along to read at lunch and left it lying beside his plate. A messenger was rushed off, but he returned with the statement that the waiter had not seen such a paper. He added that the waiter was a low browed, suspicious looking chap and that he was probably a liar.

For two long days a number of first and second and third lords held their breath. The official safe was searched no less than fifty times. The top of a bare table was scanned until the eyes of the scanners ached. The waste paper basket, the floor, the coal rack, the corners and all other places were searched, but in vain. Two detectives were detailed to watch every movement of the waiter. The cabman who had driven the first lord to lunch and back was put under surveillance. The clerical staff was made to feel that it might find itself in Newgate within the next twenty-four hours, and had New Zealand captured Australia the excitement in that particular department could not have been more intense.

When the first lord and the second lord and the third lord went into secret council for the tenth time, turning even the broom and the door mat out into the hall and stopping up the keyhole of the door, the two latter lords had some figures to submit. A reward must be offered for the return of the document, and it must be large enough to appeal to the cupidity of the robber. They figured that \$50,000 would do it and that the first lord would have to pay it out of his own pocket. If he hadn't been so fat and stupid he would have faltered away. As it was, he was properly crushed for the next proposition.

The idea was to have him disappear for a couple of months. When the thief found that no reward was to be offered he might return the document. There was a belief that he was a personal enemy of the first lord and had meant to spite him alone. If the first lord would get out of the country for a few weeks or months the second and third lords would carry on the case with every hope to save England and the honor of the honorable.

The first lord jumped at the opportunity held out. He didn't want to see England plunged into calamity and neither did he want to pay a reward of \$50,000. He left the office immediately and hastened home to pack up and start for Switzerland, and a long breath of relief extended from the second lord down to the smallest messenger boy. Some one was paid a large fee for work done, and the incident was closed—that is, the first lord wrote back weekly to ask if the document had been found, and the second lord answered as regularly that it had not, but he was still hot on the trail. After six or eight weeks had passed the first lord was one day handed the missing document by a disguised man who fled on the instant, but the lord retired to his bedroom and opened the envelope.

There was a document. It was a written recipe for making French cottage cheese. The first lord shut one eye and sat and thought for an hour. Then the light dawned, and he laid the document aside and whispered:

"A man may be a first lord and a first ass at the same time, and I'm a living example of the fact."

A Responsive Audience.
A well known player, whose forte is romantic comedy, tells an amusing story in connection with the production some years ago of an unsuccessful comedy. This comedy was a dire failure, drawing but meager audiences. The record in this respect was reached when the curtain rose on a Wednesday matinee in Brooklyn, with fifteen persons in the house. In the front of the house there was but one occupant—a young girl in the second row. In the first row of the balcony sat one young man.

The play opened with a scene on the deck of a yacht, and as the leading man emerged from the cabin and gazed into the empty gulf before him, he spoke his first line:

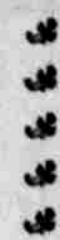
"The sea is purple. Have you, too, noticed it?"

Whereupon the voice of the young man in the balcony responded, "I don't know about the young lady downstairs, but I can see it very plainly."—Harper's Weekly

A Pithy Sermon.

Here is the pithiest sermon ever preached: "Our ingress into life is naked and bare, our progress through life is trouble and care, our egress out of it we know not where; but, doing well here, we shall do well there. I could not tell more by preaching a year."

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